

# Multiple Conditional Advocacies and Advocating Permutations: A Match Made out of Desperation

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## *Introduction*

In the final round of the 2009 National Debate Tournament (NDT), Nate Johnson and Brett Bricker of the University of Kansas were affirmative against Alex Lamballe and Seth Gannon of Wake Forest University. The record books will reflect that Kansas defeated Wake Forest on a 4-1 decision, giving Kansas its first NDT win since 1983 and ending an impressive run for the Wake Forest University duo that had won the NDT the previous year as juniors. For many coaches, however, the final round signaled something larger about the era of negative debate strategy we are judging and coaching in today.

As is often the case in the final round of the NDT, Kansas read a new affirmative. The first negative constructive, however, was different from most other final rounds in recent memory. It was not the type of arguments that caused the room to gasp. Many final round participants had offered a states counterplan, an offset counterplan, a condition counterplan, a decoupling counterplan, a Taoism critique, a series of topicality arguments, and a series of disads. The difference was that few final round participants had *all* of these arguments in the same first negative constructive. It was when Lamballe announced that there would be ten off-case positions (and later added an eleventh during his speech) that many coaches and participants began to consider the factors that had led us to this first negative constructive.

In this essay, I examine the practice of defending multiple conditional advocacies.<sup>3</sup> Although there are plenty of justifications for advocating the end of the practice all together, I argue that we have crossed a threshold that cannot be simply undone. Instead of calling for rejection, I argue in favor of the principal that has guided the evolution of debate theory for decades—reciprocity. In particular, I argue for returning to the practice of allowing the affirmative to advocate legitimate permutations when the negative has initiated multiple conditional advocacies. This essay, then, develops in three stages. First, I review the evolution of negative strategy that resulted in multiple conditional advocacies. Second, I outline the basic competitive imbalances that result from the practice. Third, I argue that the ability of the affirmative to advocate permutations represents one solution for resolving the competitive imbalances. I conclude that debaters should integrate the ability to advocate a legitimate permutation into their theory objections to multiple conditional advocacies and judges should consider adding a similar statement to their judge philosophies.

## *“The Road”: Arriving at Multiple Conditional Advocacies*

Johnson’s second affirmative constructive answered all eleven off-case positions with such efficiency that at the conclusion of his speech he received a standing ovation from the large audience enjoying the debate. Although Kansas won the debate, the victory did not stem from a theoretical objection. In fact, Johnson did not even argue conditionality was illegitimate or multiple conditional advocacies were illegitimate in his second affirmative constructive. Given the extreme nature of the first negative constructive that may sound surprising, but the increased acceptance of multiple conditional advocacies has conditioned (no pun intended) many affirmative teams to seek alternate remedies.

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<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank Scott Phillips, the faculty and students at the University of Michigan Summer Debate Workshop, the coaches and debaters at Wake Forest University, and two anonymous reviewers for their advice and help with this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, there is very little data available on the number of teams engaging in any practice at any given time. As a result, the majority of my evidence is anecdotal. As of the time of this writing, I have rarely judged, coached, and/or heard of negative teams consistently reading five conditional advocacies in the same debate. That being said, I have observed a dramatic increase in the number of negative teams reading multiple conditional advocacies in recent years. Most often, the negative defends two counterplans or a counterplan and a critique in the same debate. There are a variety of theoretical arguments used to justify these more limited situations, but the interesting thing about the debate community is that sometimes the anomaly becomes the norm since the vast majority of the judging community is made up of former debaters so as a practice becomes more acceptable among the debaters it becomes more acceptable to future judges.

As is the case with most practices in debate, the seeds are sown in earlier debates and evolving community norms. In this section, I argue that there were three important evolutions in debate theory and practice that encouraged the practice of multiple conditional advocacies. First, the debate community, on the whole, is doing more research than ever before. Second, the increased acceptance and development of critical arguments has provided negative teams with a variety of ways of “testing” affirmatives. Third, the increased acceptance and development of process counterplans have provided the negative with insulated counterplans that result in the passage of the plan, but have built-in net benefits making them stand alone options.

Although there is little historical record to compare the quality and quantity of evidence available to debaters today, there are several trends that support the thesis that the debate community is producing and consuming more (although not necessarily better) research than ever before.<sup>4</sup> The easiest explanation for the differential is that information has steadily become more available to college debaters and coaches. Unlike the 1990’s when access to Lexis-Nexis provided some debate squads with massive competitive advantages, today’s debaters have a wealth of information at their disposal. The increasing power of internet search engines along with electronic journals (like this one) and extensive databases have provided college debaters with ample opportunity to find materials related to their topic of study.

The culmination of these research opportunities has produced a competitive environment wherein debaters have access to a wider variety of arguments. With this wider array of arguments comes an increased expectation that the debaters can utilize those arguments during a competitive debate. It is only natural that a debater would want to maximize the competitive rewards that come with spending countless hours preparing on a topic. The argumentative strategy that results from this combination of increased access to evidence and the competitive urge to use it is simple: why restrict yourself to one conditional advocacy when you have more than one ready for the debate? Tradition and norms pale in comparison to the competitive gains a team receives with multiple conditional options in one debate.

Determining the acceptability of an argument based on the prevalence of evidence does not stop with the debaters. Judges have long articulated that having a solvency advocate was one of the primary indicators of whether or not an affirmative team should be prepared to debate a counterplan.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, even the most staunch policy judges tend to agree that critical arguments are relevant when the negative has a specific link to the affirmative proposal.<sup>6</sup> The question, therefore, becomes is it acceptable for a negative team to defend both a counterplan with a specific solvency advocate and a critical argument with a specific link? Increasingly, judges have been answering the question with a “yes” and primarily because the affirmative’s claim that the positions are unpredictable and therefore unfair is much more difficult to accept when the negative’s advocacies are inextricably tied to the basic affirmative claim.

The small hypothetical above demonstrates the second major reason why multiple conditional advocacies have gained increased popularity—the increasing acceptance and development of critical arguments. Rather than limiting the negative to arguments that prove the affirmative plan is worse than the status quo or a competitive policy option, critical arguments provide the negative with a wider array of attacks including, but not limited to, challenging the affirmatives assumptions, methodology, and discourse. It would be difficult to summarize all the critical arguments that have been initiated in competitive debate in one essay (much less one paragraph), but suffice it to say that critical arguments are different from counterplans and disads insofar as they change the question of the debate away from comparing the affirmative plan to the status quo or a competitive policy option. As these arguments have become more developed and more accepted in the debate community, negative teams have searched for a way to integrate these arguments into a diverse strategy. How then, can negative teams have their argumentative cake and eat it too?

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<sup>4</sup> The introduction of new media sources (such as blogs) has the potential to once again renew the conversation over the standards for evidence use in debates. Some coaches have argued that it is the introduction of more evidence from non-peer reviewed sources that has encouraged the development of a wider range of weaker arguments. The argument is that many of the “wackier” arguments would not survive the scrutiny of peer review, but can easily be posted to a blog. Opponents suggest that the peer review process is too limiting and that debaters should be trained in how to differentiate between good and bad arguments regardless of where they are published. I hope that these conversations move beyond the hallways and into a debate journal for more people to read and participate.

<sup>5</sup> See the extensive discussion regarding the states counterplan that begins with Galloway, Ryan. *eDebate*. April 3, 2009. <http://www.ndtceda.com/pipermail/edebate/2009-April/078259.html>

<sup>6</sup> See Brovero, Adrienne. *Judge Philosophy*. <http://judgephilosophies.wikispaces.com/Brovero,+Adrienne>

The tension between negative critical arguments and negative policy arguments is difficult to resolve without some form of conditionality. After all, most of the objections to the affirmative raised by critical arguments would equally apply to any counterplan read in the same debate. Given the clear interactions between the negative critical and policy arguments, many debaters have simply resorted to defending multiple conditional advocacies. As of now, the only other alternative is for the negative to eliminate one of its options to maintain consistency throughout the debate. Although there are certainly judges, coaches, and debaters that prefer this option, the increased acceptance of critical arguments has incentivized negative teams to research them as important components of a diverse strategy. As noted above, once a debater has a potential winning argument in his/her arsenal it is difficult to restrict its use in the name of tradition, norms, and/or protecting the other team.

The final major trend that has led the negative towards the practice of multiple conditional advocacies is the increased acceptance and development of process counterplans that compete off of the certainty of the plan's passage. Early process counterplans started with the assumption that the Affirmative plan may not be a bad idea, but that the process by which the plan is imagined to have passed is objectionable. These counterplans typically involved manipulating the political process to ensure that the negative could capture the benefits of the affirmative plan. The negative then garnered a net-benefit by virtue of the change in the process. Affirmative teams (over the past decade in particular) adapted through a combination of refusing to specify a political process and winning that the affirmative's permutation to pass the plan through the same mechanism proposed by the negative. For a little while, it appeared as though process counterplans were doomed.

Process counterplans, however, did "not go gentle into that good night."<sup>7</sup> Instead, negative teams adapted to the affirmative strategy and developed a new type of counterplan that relied on a different model of competition. Rather than relying on the affirmative to specify the process by which the plan would be done, negative teams have developed counterplans that offer a risk that the plan will not be done at all. These counterplans do not have a universally accepted label, but the one characteristic that they all share is that they generate competition from the *certainty* of the affirmative's passage. A simple example is the consultation counterplan which proposes the affirmative plan to a third party and if that party agrees that the plan is a good idea proceeds with passage of the plan. Inherent in this counterplan is the potential that the third party could say no. As a result, the affirmative cannot easily permute the counterplan because the permutation runs the risk of severing the certainty of the passage of the plan. The consultation counterplan (which is still prominent today) is one of the earliest versions of this counterplan, but more recently a new series of these counterplans have come into existence.

The newest versions of process counterplans do not simply ask a third party for a thumb up or a thumb down concerning the plan. Instead, the counterplans use the affirmative plan as an incentive for the third party to take a positive action. In doing so, the counterplan not only captures the entire affirmative solvency it also creates a net-benefit out of the positive action they have induced the third party to do. A corollary of this counterplan uses the affirmative as a threat to a third party. If that country does not agree to take (or stop doing) a particular action, the affirmative plan would be done. The result is that often the negative defends that the third party would in fact say no, resulting in the affirmative plan being done, but that the strong stance the United States took against the third party is beneficial to our national image abroad. Once again, in both of these scenarios there is always a risk that the third party will respond in a way that means the affirmative plan does not get enacted making any permutation difficult. The beauty of these counterplans is that the negative has the opportunity to defend the complete passage of the affirmative plan while simultaneously garnering a net-benefit through the process by which it passes.

In addition to the strategic benefit of capturing the affirmative proposal, process counterplans that compete off of the certainty of the plan help the negative in very pragmatic ways as well. The primary pragmatic benefit is that the position is entirely insulated from the rest of the debate. For the most part, the final negative rebuttalist has the option of ignoring the rest of the debate in its entirety since almost all of the affirmative's offense traditionally stems from the passage of the plan. The result is that these process counterplans have become extremely popular (two of the counterplans read in the final round by Wake Forest fit this model). Similar to critical arguments, however, process counterplans rarely fit cohesively within a diverse negative strategy because almost any objection to the affirmative plan will inevitably link back to the counterplan. As the variety

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<sup>7</sup> From Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."

and scope of these counterplans increases, the negative has a greater incentive to have more than one in a debate or to simply defend a process counterplan while simultaneously defending another counterplan and/or a critical argument. In short, the efficiency with which these counterplans can destroy an affirmative has encouraged teams to read more of them in a debate than other counterplans that rely on a traditional net-benefit for competition. As of now, the only way to read more than one of these counterplans in a debate alongside other arguments is to defend the practice of multiple conditional advocacies.

There are certainly other factors that may be responsible for the practice of multiple conditional advocacies, but these three variables appear to have coalesced to create the perfect storm of “negative flexibility” leaving some judges and debaters in agreement that affirmative teams should stop complaining and simply beat all of the conditional advocacies.<sup>8</sup> Although it may already be apparent to some, in the next section, I discuss just how difficult that task can be even for the most competent affirmative teams.

### *Not Simply Tipping...Breaking the Scale: The Competitive Imbalances Associated with Multiple Conditional Advocacies*

The practice of multiple conditional advocacies leaves the affirmative at a competitive disadvantage for a variety of reasons. Similar to the original arguments against conditionality, multiple conditional advocacies have the potential to generate unfair time pressures on the affirmative (the first affirmative rebuttal in particular). Additionally, multiple conditional advocacies can encourage the negative to simply go for the least covered arguments which not only has an impact on competitive fairness, but also makes the entire debate a less educational experience because the final arguments are picked because they have had the least amount of time dedicated to debating them. Although both of these arguments are powerful and the competitive imbalances are certainly amplified when there are multiple conditional advocacies in a debate, these are arguments that fundamentally apply to conditionality as well as multiple conditional advocacies.<sup>9</sup> In this section, rather than rehashing these traditional arguments against conditionality, I focus on the most pernicious competitive advantage that comes directly from the negative’s ability to defend multiple conditional advocacies in the same debate: the rope-a-dope.

Muhammad Ali made the rope-a-dope strategy famous through his epic boxing match against George Foreman. Rather than attacking Foreman directly, he waited for Foreman to attack. Then, after taking a defensive position and weathering the storm of Foreman’s blows, Ali took advantage of the fact that Foreman had grown tired and unleashed a furious counter-assault. Ali won the fight and ever since people have cited this strategy as the rope-a-dope. The basic characteristic of the rope-a-dope is taking advantage of an opponent’s offense by waiting until the prime opportunity to exploit it as a weakness. In a debate context, the rope-a-dope is when a team utilizes their opponent’s offense against them. Although there are many instances when teams can utilize the rope-a-dope strategy (like reading a topicality argument to generate a link to a disadvantage), multiple conditional advocacies enable the negative to position the affirmative in a lose-lose situation beyond anything traditional conditionality.

This year’s high school topic on withdrawing military presence is already serving as a case study in using multiple conditional advocacies to crush the affirmative through debate’s version of the rope-a-dope. As summer debate workshop files are steadily being produced, practice debates across the country are starting to take shape. In the twenty plus debates I have judged this summer, I have seen the following exchange with regularity.

#### Example #1: Representation Critique Contradictions

1NC

2AC Offense

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<sup>8</sup> An additional factor could be that debaters today are less likely to believe that theory objections can win debates. Post round interactions suggest that current debaters believe the time investment necessary to win a theory debate is too difficult. The irony, of course, is that part of the reason why the affirmative (and the 1ar in particular) are so stretched for time may be precisely because the negative has so many options available in any given debate.

<sup>9</sup> Anyone interested in learning more about conditionality must at a minimum read Solt, Roger. “The Disposition of Counterplans and Permutations: The case for Logical, Limited Conditionality.” *Debater’s Research Guide*. 2003. <http://groups.wfu.edu/debate/MiscSites/DRGArticles/Solt2003.htm>.

Consult Japan Counterplan  
Net Benefit: Strong relations solve war

Turn: Consulting Japan collapses U.S. hegemony

Critique of security representations  
Alternative: Reject security discourse

Turn: The affirmative solves current flaws in security discourse by defending a withdrawal of U.S. troops.

In this example, the negative is defending two conditional advocacies under the guise of “testing the affirmative in the policy and critical worlds.” The affirmative in this debate has initiated offense on both of the negative’s positions. Taken in isolation, the affirmative’s offense is powerful against each of the negative’s options. The problem for the affirmative, however, is that the negative is about to pull a rope-a-dope strategy wherein they utilize the affirmative’s offense on one position against them on the other position.

In example #1, the rope-a-dope is fairly simple. The affirmative has attempted to link turn the security representations argument by claiming that the first affirmative constructive was not an example of traditional security rhetoric. Instead, the affirmative claims that their defense of removing U.S. troops downplays the importance of U.S. military presence throughout the world and in doing so challenges traditional security representations. A cunning negative debater, however, would point out that although the first affirmative speech may have met the affirmative’s description of challenging traditional security representations, the second affirmative speech made the mistake of claiming that U.S. hegemony was good on the consult Japan counterplan. The negative team then clarifies that they are no longer advocating the consult Japan counterplan (whose original net-benefit also linked to the security representations argument), but that they want the judge to circle the second affirmative’s claim that U.S. hegemony is good because that is the new link to the security representations argument.

Although the above example is frustrating, some readers may suggest that fundamentally it was the affirmative that chose to read the hegemony turn on the consult counterplan so the negative should have the ability to take advantage of their strategic blunder. Another example (actually read in several debates on the social services high school topic) demonstrates a bit more extreme example of this practice:

#### Example #2: Ideological Contradictions

##### 1NC

##### 2AC Offense

Free Market Counterplan  
Net-Benefit: Objectivism

???

Critique of Capitalism  
Alternative: Withdrawal from capitalism

???

Example #2 situates the affirmative in an even more difficult position. Certainly, the affirmative could attempt to beat both positions without reading any offense, but that seems like an unwise approach to defeating any major negative position. Obviously, if the affirmative makes the mistake of defending capitalism good against the critique then they have simultaneously provided offense for the counterplan. If, however, the affirmative tried to be cunning and win that the counterplan was actually worse for capitalism then they have also fell for a rope-a-dope because the negative can concede that argument to make the critique of capitalism a net-benefit for the counterplan.

In example #2 the negative is clearly defending two positions that contradict on almost every conceivable plane of argumentative existence. Although the affirmative has ample opportunity for a multiple conditional advocacies bad argument (or more simply a contradictory arguments bad argument) there is little room for the affirmative to read offense that cannot be used against themselves on either position.

#### Example #3: Dueling Counterplan Solvency

##### 1NC

CP #1: Do the plan if Russia agrees to shore up its nuclear weapons.

Net-Benefit: Loose nukes are dangerous with a terrorism impact.

CP #2: Do the plan if Russia does NOT agree to shore up its nuclear weapons.

Net-Benefit: A strong signal that we care about securing weapons is important for hegemony.

Example #3 shows just how dangerous the combination of process counterplans and multiple conditional advocacies can be for the affirmative. In this example, the affirmative can attempt to garner offense through the terminal impacts of the net-benefits, but no matter which way the second affirmative answers the basic argument that Russia will say “yes” or “no” they have provided solvency for the other counterplan. Additionally, the attempt to impact turn the net-benefits can open up a web of argument interactions that reward the negative. For instance, if the affirmative tries to impact turn CP#2 with a hegemony bad argument then the negative can read their hegemony is vital for an effective war on terror to access the original impacts from CP#1.

Example #4: Disadvantage Interactions

1NC

Security Representations Critique

Alternative: Reject Security Discourse

Consult Japan Counterplan

Net-Benefit: Alliance Key to Solving War in East Asia

Deterrence Disad

This example provides the negative with ample opportunities for rope-a-dope strategies. The negative can concede any of the affirmative link turns on deterrence to prove the links to the security representations critique. Conversely, the negative can concede any link or impact turns on the security representations critique to help them bolster the link or impact on deterrence. Finally, if the negative decides to go for the counterplan they can simply ignore the argument interactions on the other two advocacies all together because the counterplan should result in the affirmative plan being passed.

Under the guise of “testing” the affirmative, negative teams have adopted the practice of multiple conditional advocacies with little or no competitive recourse for the affirmative. The rope-a-dope strategy is particularly devastating when the negative has a representations critique in the debate because despite the fact that the first affirmative may have had little to no link to the negative’s argument, any second affirmative link or impact turn on one of the other issues in the debate can be construed as a new link to the representation critique. Similarly, process counterplans like the ones in example #3 have the potential to deny the affirmative the solvency argument against the counterplans (which is often the affirmative’s best chance at winning).

At its core, the rope-a-dope strategy works because only the negative team is able to access the interactions between the various conditional advocacies. If the affirmative attempts to point out that in example #1 the consultation counterplan links to security representations critique the negative simply has to announce that they are not going for one or the other and the affirmative has very little they can do to regain that offense. If, however, at any point in the debate it becomes strategic for the negative to concede an affirmative argument there is no reciprocal mechanism for the affirmative to triage their original argument.

The simplest way to articulate the competitive imbalance that stems from multiple conditional advocacies is to say that the negative has the ability to argue without assuming as much (if any) risk for their arguments while anything the affirmative says can and will be used against them throughout the debate. The negative has always been able to initiate arguments that force the affirmative into a strategic double bind (e.g. reading substantial topicality to win a link to a perception disadvantage), but these negative strategies have always carried risks associated with the arguments (for instance the affirmative may use the we meet on substantially to prove that the affirmative has a better international signal than the negative’s counterplan). With multiple conditional advocacies the negative has the ability to generate a new level of strategic imbalance without assuming a reciprocal amount of risk.

In short, multiple conditional advocacies grant the negative a type of diplomatic immunity and, as a result, they drive around intoxicated with negative flexibility with little concern for the competitive balance they plow through on their way to the next elimination debate. In order to restore some of the competitive balance, we must consider how we can level the playing field for the affirmative. In the next section, I outline one potential remedy for discussion.

### *An Eye for an Eye and an Argument for an Argument: Advocating Permutations*

In my discussions with colleagues about this essay, several people argued that the simplest solution would be to coach debaters to win the argument that multiple conditional advocacies are bad for debate and a voting issue. The hope is that the losses would add up and that negative teams would be deterred from the practice all together. My initial reaction was to agree and I certainly do not want to discourage debaters from trying that approach, but upon further review this approach seems insufficient for two reasons. First, I fundamentally believe that the genie is out of the bottle. As I discussed in the first section of this essay, the path that brought us to multiple conditional advocacies involves factors beyond the control of any one debater or judge to deter. Research will continue to get more efficient and debaters will continue to push the evolution of critical arguments and counterplan theory. Rather than simply closing our eyes, clicking our heels, and hoping that we can return to a period before multiple conditional advocacies, we must start investigating ways to restore competitive balance assuming multiple conditional advocacies are here to stay.

Second, claims that debaters should just win debates on theoretical objections overlook the wide spectrum of beliefs regarding voting on theoretical objections.<sup>10</sup> A cursory glance at judge philosophies suggests that judges prefer theory compromises rather than theory voting issues.<sup>11</sup> If the theoretical objection is not a voting issue then multiple conditional advocacies advance the debate into uncharted territories. For instance, what would it mean to “reject the argument—not the team”? What exactly is the judge rejecting in that scenario? This short thought experiment demonstrates the difficulty in attempting to stop a debate practice through theoretical objections alone.

How then, should we approach the dilemma presented by multiple conditional advocacies (and the rope-a-dope strategy in particular). Rather than calling for an outright rejection, it makes more sense to return the basic concept of reciprocity. For decades, reciprocity has been the analytic tool used to determine if a debate practice should be emulated or eviscerated. Appeals to reciprocity suggest that the competitive balance between two teams is more important than other values associated education and/or skills. The assumption is that the first question that we should use to determine if a practice should be acceptable or not is whether or not it disrupts the potential for both sides to have an equal opportunity to win the debate.<sup>12</sup>

Most debaters assume that reciprocity serves as a bright line that determines the acceptability of an argument. If an argument turns out to not be reciprocal for both teams then the judge should reject the argument. There is, however, another perspective on reciprocity—that it serves to legitimate practices that might otherwise be deemed as unfair. For example, if a negative team justifies conditionality by arguing that conditionality is legitimate because it encourages the search for the best policy option then the affirmative may have increased legitimacy for a non-intrinsicness argument using the same logic. In order for this understanding of reciprocity to be persuasive, debaters must be able to articulate a connection between the new practices being legitimated through reciprocity in terms of the original practice that creates the inequity. In other words, debaters must answer why a practice justifies something that is routinely dismissed as illegitimate.

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<sup>10</sup> For an extended discussion, see: Solt, Roger. “Theory as a Voting Issue: The Crime of Punishment.” *Debater’s Research Guide*. 2002. <http://groups.wfu.edu/debate/MiscSites/DRGArticles/THEORY%20AS%20A%20VOTING%20ISSUE.doc>

<sup>11</sup> Brad Hall, for instance, writes: “Rejecting the argument, not the team, is always my default position unless there is a well warranted/explained reason for rejecting the team... Conditionality is the one area where I struggle with the voting issue question, but I would prefer the debaters propose an alternate remedy – e.g. stick the 2NR with the cplan if they kicked it, or kick the cplan if the 2NR went for it.” Hall, Brad. “Judge Philosophy.” <http://judgephilosophies.wikispaces.com/Hall,+Brad>

<sup>12</sup> As debate has become more self-reflexive, it has become clear that terms like “fairness” and “abuse” often overlook the structural inequalities that exist in debate that make it difficult to ever determine the game is 100% fair. I do not mean to suggest that any given debate will ever be totally fair, but that in specific relation to multiple conditional advocacies I think we should consider ways of improving the game as best we can.

In the spirit of identifying theoretical compromises and using the analytic lens of reciprocity, let us consider the possibility that we should return to the practice of allowing the affirmative to advocate a legitimate permutation when the negative has initiated more than one conditional advocacy in the first negative constructive.<sup>13</sup> The justification for this concept is simple: allowing the affirmative to advocate a permutation would force the negative to consider argument interactions in the same way that the affirmative does when there are multiple conditional options in a debate. Obviously, negative teams defending multiple conditional advocacies will be frustrated at the notion that the affirmative can initiate a wide array of permutations and thus increase the potential cross applications between positions—but that is the point. If a negative team wants the advantage of being able to use the affirmative's offense against them then there must be a reciprocal risk for the negative.

Permutations have always been a point of frustration for the negative. For the past six or seven years, negative teams have won the norm that permutations are simply a test of competition and should never be a legitimate option for the affirmative to advocate at the end of the debate. The test of competition model of permutations made sense when the impact of successfully winning a permutation meant that the plan was then compared to the status quo because the counterplan was proven to be non-competitive. Once compared to the status quo, the affirmative was supposed to have a strategic advantage because they had already read a first affirmative constructive that generated offense against the status quo. That model, however, makes less sense in the world of multiple conditional advocacies because winning that a counterplan is non-competitive does not provide the affirmative with any strategic advantage. In fact, the removal of the counterplan only provides the negative with a potential rope-a-dope strategy wherein the negative uses the affirmative's offense against them on another conditional advocacy.

The crux of the competitive imbalance that stems from the rope-a-dope strategy is that the negative is able to debate risk free while the affirmative is forced to defend a litany of claims throughout the debate. If the negative was forced to consider how a permutation on one advocacy interacts with the alternate advocacy they intended to go for at the end of the debate then the playing field begins to tilt back towards level. Reviewing our previous examples demonstrates that the ability to advocate a legitimate permutation helps the affirmative in some instances, but that advocating permutations is not the equivalent of a death knell for the negative. In other words, the negative still has plenty of options to control the debate, but they must think through the interactions and assess the new risk that stems from reading the multiple conditional advocacies. Let us return to our previous discussion of example #4.

#### Example #4

##### 1NC

Security Representations Critique  
Alternative: Reject Security Discourse

Consult Japan Counterplan  
Net-Benefit: Alliance Key to Solving War in East Asia

##### Deterrence Disad

Example #4 was taken from a summer workshop practice debate. During the debate, the second negative rebuttalist kicked both conditional options and won the debate on the deterrence disadvantage. The impact to the deterrence disadvantage included two scenarios: deterring Chinese aggression against Taiwan and preventing Japanese rearmament. Interestingly enough, both of those impact areas had been a part of the negative's extension of the consultation counterplan in the block. Had the affirmative had the ability to

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<sup>13</sup> Many debaters today will find it odd to know that once upon a time it was common for affirmative's to advocate a permutation if it was in their strategic interest. Roger Solt's seminal essay on limited logical conditionality includes an extended discussion of why affirmative's should be able to advocate a permutation including the statement, "That the theory of counterplan disposition is a theory of limited conditionality should be clear. The negative gets one counterplan, just as the affirmative gets one plan. The negative also gets the status quo as a policy option, just as the affirmative gets any legitimate permutation." Solt, Roger. "The Disposition of Counterplans and Permutations: The case for Logical, Limited Conditionality." *Debater's Research Guide*. 2003.  
<http://groups.wfu.edu/debate/MiscSites/DRGArticles/Solt2003.htm>



advocate the permutation in this debate then the permutation would have had the potential to solve the baseline impacts for the deterrence disad using the negative's own evidence from the block. In this instance, the rope-a-dope would have been performed by the affirmative rather than the negative. Now, let us look back at example #1 where the representations critique was still in the debate:

#### Example #1

##### 1NC

Consult Japan Counterplan  
Net Benefit: Strong relations solve war

Critique of security representations  
Alternative: Reject security discourse

##### 2AC Offense

Turn: Consulting Japan collapses U.S. hegemony

Turn: The affirmative solves current flaws in security discourse by defending a withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The rope-a-dope available to the negative in example #1 was based off of the second affirmative's offense that U.S. hegemony was good. The ability of the permutation on the consultation counterplan to solve/turn the representations critique depends on how far the negative goes in the block to generate new links to the affirmative. If, for instance, the negative deploys the common argument that "the affirmative has portrayed the U.S. as the savior for the world through the presumption that the U.S. should act at all" then the permutation to give another sovereign country control over this particular decision should help neutralize the American hubris thesis of the new link argument. Similarly, if the negative reads an additional alternative solvency card that argues that judge should adopt the perspective of someone that has experience U.S. military dominance rather than making a decision based on what is "good" for the U.S. then the permutation on the consultation counterplan may provide a way for the affirmative to articulate a justification for the affirmative using the perspective of the only nation to experience the use of U.S. atomic weapons.

The point here, once again, is not that the permutation will always represent a way to win for the affirmative, but that the risk that the permutation *can* generate interactions between the negative's issues creates risk and should change the way the negative team approaches their arguments. Instead of reading their generic second negative alternative solvency block on the representations critique, the negative will have to make sure that they are not accidentally reading solvency for the permutation on the counterplan. The extreme examples demonstrate how a permutation can directly impact the negative's ability to successfully deploy important components of their advocacies. Let us return to the extreme ideological contradiction for an example:

#### Example #2

##### 1NC

Free Market Counterplan  
Net-Benefit: Objectivism

Critique of Capitalism  
Alternative: Withdrawal from Capitalism

##### 2AC Offense

???

???

In this example, the permutation can be important for the affirmative to defeat the offense either ideological position has against the status quo. For example, many negative debates have been won because the affirmative's offensive justifications for capitalism depend on winning the sustainability of capitalism. If the negative wins that the status quo is unsustainable then they can access their capitalism bad arguments and dismiss the affirmative's capitalism good arguments with a "try or die" type of logic. What if, however, the affirmative was able to utilize the vast array of solvency cards the negative read defending the Free Market counterplan? Many of the free market scholars argue that the reason that we have problems of overconsumption, environmental degradation, and unfair distribution of resources is precisely because the free market has not been allowed to function in its most efficient form. In this instance, the permutation may provide the affirmative with a way to access their capitalism good arguments by using the solvency from the free market permutation to "create sustainability."

On the reverse side of the debate, if the negative attempts to win that the free market is essential to fixing the problems of the status quo, the permutation that includes “withdrawing from capitalism” provides the affirmative with an opportunity to access the alternative solvency evidence as a counter set of advocates for addressing the problems of the status quo system. In this scenario, the potential of the permutation to influence the debate once again depends on how much additional solvency evidence the negative has read for their capitalism critique.

What the above examples demonstrate is that simply advocating a permutation does not guarantee that the affirmative can always gain the strategic advantage in the debate. If the second negative rebuttal wins that either a) the permutation is illegitimate or b) that the permutation has no interaction with the other options in the debate then the negative has not subjected themselves to a rope-a-dope. The point remains, however, that the negative in those situations is forced to actually consider the risk associated with reading more offense on a given position in the same way that the affirmative currently has to consider the risks associated with reading offense on a given position. The doctrine of reciprocity does not dictate that the negative should simply lose; instead, the negative should be forced to think through argument interactions and be held accountable to the risks associated with initiating offense because that is precisely what the affirmative must consider when multiple conditional advocacies are a part of the debate.

In addition to honoring the doctrine of reciprocity, allowing the affirmative to advocate a permutation when the negative has initiated multiple conditional advocacies has the potential to produce net better debates. As I discussed in the first section, debaters are doing more research than ever before primarily because access to information has dramatically improved over the past decade. That being said, increased access does not mean that every argument ever written on a subject merits discussion in a debate. Currently, the negative simply has to win that an argument was created from the literature base surrounding the affirmative. As that literature base continually grows, however, debaters are finding that there are often wildly contradictory reasons why scholars disagree with proposals. Rather than forcing the negative to consider which arguments are better than others, multiple conditional advocacies allow the negative to simply defend all the contradictory arguments at once and hope that one of them is better than the others at the end of the debate. Allowing the affirmative to advocate a permutation has the potential to radically change the pre-tournament decision calculus for the negative so that instead of simply amassing a wide range of shallow arguments against an affirmative they are incentivized to develop a well researched consistent attack because there is less risk that a permutation on a contradictory advocacy could dramatically affect the negative's offense.

### *Conclusion: Let's Try Some Rambunctious Reciprocity*

There are two ways that advocating a legitimate permutation when the negative has initiated multiple conditional advocacies can be integrated into current debate practice. First, affirmative teams can add a line to the end of their theory objections to multiple conditional advocacies that states, “If the negative wins that multiple conditional advocacies are legitimate then we should be allowed to advocate one legitimate permutation to create a reciprocal argument risk for the negative.”<sup>14</sup> Obviously, that line in and of itself does not establish all of the necessary components of the argument, but in my experience second affirmative constructives rarely have time to develop much more than an efficient summary when presenting a theoretical objection. The key portion of the statement is the “even if” nature of the argument. When combined with a series of theoretical objections to multiple conditional advocacies this last line provides the affirmative with the ability to either continue to advance the objections as voting issues or to use the legitimate permutation as the compromise position. As I have discussed earlier, I believe that judges prefer a compromise position, but that does not mean that affirmative teams should forfeit the strategic benefit of having a more substantial objection to multiple conditional advocacies. The “even if” nature of the argument also gives the affirmative *the choice* to actually advocate a legitimate permutation rather than being stuck with the permutation when it is not the most strategic option for the debate.

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that a standard conditionality bad theory block is not adequate in this situation. As I noted in the second section of the paper, many of the arguments against multiple conditional advocacies are similar to the objections to conditionality bad arguments, but the better the affirmative team is at describing the degree of difference between one conditional option and multiple conditional options the easier it will be for the judge to understand how advocating a permutation is reciprocal.

The second way to integrate this remedy into debate practice is for judges to include a statement in their judge philosophies explaining why this remedy is or is not a reasonable compromise. Several judges have begun to comment on the increased use of multiple conditional advocacies in debates in their judge philosophies, but for good reason the remedy is difficult to articulate. Casey Harrigan, head debate coach at the University of Georgia, has this to say in his philosophy:

For a little while, I've felt like I have been one of the most Neg-leaning judges in the pool. Conditionality has been a virtual non-option for the Aff in front of me. To "reject the team" for reading a PIC or international fiat has been unthinkable.

However, things are getting out of hand. I think others are noticing it too. The Neg is getting away with way too much. 2 counterplans is OK if it is a new Aff. If it isn't, it seems excessive.

The problem isn't so much that it's unfair" – it's that the depth of discussion in such "run-and-gun" debates is far too shallow. This defeats the purpose of hard work – a d-rule for me.

I'm not sure what the remedy is. I'll probably try to reign in how much latitude that I'm willing to regularly afford to the Neg – and probably use the normal flow of speaker points to Neg teams that at least attempt a serious discussion of the Affirmative.<sup>15</sup>

If more judges follow Harrigan's lead and begin to discuss multiple conditional advocacies while suggesting a legitimate permutation as potential solution then it will incentivize debaters to consider making it a central part of the affirmative's theory strategy.

This essay has attempted to mark a moment in our current debate practices. The moment is difficult to describe because the forces that generated it represent one of the best features of debate—innovation and research, but the current manifestation of those forces is creating a competitive imbalance. On the one hand, debaters are doing lots of research and want the competitive rewards that come from that research. On the other hand, affirmative teams are finding themselves in increasingly difficult situations because they are the only team in the debate that has to consider the full strategic implications of the arguments they initiate.

One response to this moment could be to try to squash the competitive imbalance by using theoretical objections to deter negative teams from ever initiating multiple conditional advocacies. In this essay, I have attempted to articulate another response that is grounded in the notion of reciprocity; mainly, that we should allow the affirmative to advocate a legitimate permutation if the negative has initiated multiple conditional advocacies. This solution is no doubt controversial, but my hope is that it will generate a conversation about our current practice of allowing the negative to run wild with multiple conditional advocacies. Perhaps out of that conversation someone will think of a better solution than the one proposed here, but in the meantime I hope that affirmative teams will consider arguing for the legitimacy of advocating a permutation to improve the quality of debates and to correct the competitive imbalance. After all, without an intervention to level the playing field for the affirmative, we may be setting a path where it would be a first negative constructive like Alex Lamballe's eleven off-case arguments that receives the audience's standing ovation.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.georgiadebate.org/page/casey-harrigan>